

Clark's Island

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Duxbury Clipper

Clark's Island Recollections: The Gunning Stand

By CLINTON E. WATSON

In the early 1900's, waterfowl were hunted commercially in Duxbury Bay from "Gunning Stands" located along the shoreline. The one I remember best was built on the north end of Clark's Island by Captain John M. Watson and several partners. The stand was built into the shoreline banking, and had a poured concrete foundation, bunks, and a kitchen area for cooking. Wire screen runways ran from the top of the bank to the shore in front of the stand. These allowed the live decoys access to the water from the pens, where they were kept on top of the bank.

Shooting was done with large caliber shotguns through ports in the east-facing wall of the stand, usually by several shooters at a time. Harvested birds were shipped by train to Boston, where they were sold at the market.

Captain Watson kept a log containing a tally of the geese

that were taken. Little data was recorded on the number of other waterfowl that were shot, although in October and November of 1922, he noted that they has bagged "2 coots, 104

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ducks, 2 teal, 2 yellowlegs, and 7 shelldrakes."

A few selected daily items from his log of 1916 included the following: Oct. 16 - Camp opened. Live geese brought down, mild day, light SW wind. Oct. 21 - Cloudy, misting, occasional rain. Wind SW moderate, temp. 66 degrees, barometer 30.225. 15 geese came in and out on the mud flat for nearly two hours when 12 broke away and flew directly in front of the stand. Tide very low, and we took a long shot and stopped 11. The first shot

of the season-four shooting. Nov. 3 - Cloudy, light NW wind, temp. 47 degrees, barometer 30.4. Just at dusk, three geese came in to the blocks, got them all. Nov. 4 - Clear morn-

ing, light NW wind. Soon as we could see, found 12-15 ducks in the duck blocks, on the beach, and in the water with the decoys, scattered, got five. Temp. 47 degrees, barometer 30.75. Nov. 6 - Cloudy, light NE wind, 12 geese came in at 8 o'clock - got them all. 5 more came in, only got 3, bad shot, five shooting. About 9 o'clock got 10 duck, just after, 12 geese came in, only got 4, poor shot, two shooting. Temp. 48 degrees, barometer 30.8. Nov. 15 - Cloudy, wind east with light snow. Temp. 34 de-

grees, barometer 30.3. Lot of geese flying, nothing doing here. Nov. 28 - Birds on beach at daylight, got 9. Temp 40 degrees, barometer 30.2. About 2 o'clock got 5 geese, clear, SW wind.

Although many of the log's daily entries record "bluebird days" with no birds flying, a summary of birds shot from 1906 through 1922, show that the gunning stand was very deadly to the population of migrating geese. The following yearly summary was included in the log: 1906-95 geese; 1907-22 geese; 1908-104 geese; 1909-98 geese; 1910-171 geese; 1911-328 geese; 1912-212 geese; 1913-151 geese; 1914-218 geese; 1915-43 geese; 1916-107 geese; 1917-101 geese; 1918-stand/ not open (war); 1919-59 geese; 1920-239 geese; 1921-258 geese; 1922-86 geese. (Total- 2,292 geese)

Clinton Watson lives on Clark's Island most of the year.